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Town Meeting



BULLETIN OF AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR

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Should Minority Groups Exercise Censorship Over Books and Films?

Moderator, **GEORGE V. DENNY, Jr.**

Speakers

HENRY EPSTEIN

MORRIS ERNST

ROBERT J. O'DONNELL

JOHN MASON BROWN

(See also page 12)

COMING

— May 17, 1949 —

What Should We Do About the Communist Threat in Asia?

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THE BROADCAST OF MAY 10:

"Should Minority Groups Exercise Censorship Over Books and Films?"

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THE BROADCAST OF MAY 17:

"What Should We Do About the Communist Threat in Asia?"



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Town Meeting

BULLETIN OF AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR

GEORGE V. DENNY, JR., MODERATOR



MAY 10, 1949

VOL. 15, No. 2

Should Minority Groups Exercise Censorship Over Books and Films?

Announcer:

Tonight, we are happy to welcome you back to Town Hall in New York City, home of "America's Town Meeting of the Air," and the busiest concert hall and auditorium in America. Last night in this hall we had a trial preview of our 'Round-the-World Town Meeting. Actually it was more complicated than any of the programs we expect to undertake this summer, for it was in three languages with each speech and question being translated into English simultaneously by interpreters from the United Nations, using the same IBM machines used at Lake Success. One speech was in French, one in German, and two in English.

As soon as the French and German speakers got under way, their voices were faded down and the clear, distinct voice of the English interpreter was brought up. A similar translation was made in French.

We got the full flavor of the personality of each speaker, yet we could understand in clear English all that was said.

With this system, each Town Meeting this summer in twelve capitals 'round-the-world will be transcribed in English for us at our regular time on this network. Also they may be broadcast locally in each country of origin in the native language.

Now to preside over our discussion, here is our moderator—the President of Town Hall, New York, and founder of America's Town Meeting—George V. Denny, Jr. Mr. Denny. (Applause.)

Moderator Denny:

Good evening, neighbors. Last week in Duluth, Minnesota, we talked about defending our freedom from possible attack from without by a totalitarian enemy. Tonight, we are considering the limitations that we, ourselves, may put upon the exercise of free-

dom in our democracy. What we read, what we see, and what we hear determine largely what we are. Our Founding Fathers knew this and considered these freedoms so important that they were embodied in the first Amendment to our Constitution.

At that time, the founders of our Constitution feared only the possible use of force by government to interfere with their individual rights. Minority pressure groups were not yet very effective. It was generally accepted belief, at that time, that that government is best which governs least.

With the increase of mass media of communications, we are aware now that minority pressure groups can force or block local, state, and national legislation.

Minority pressure groups can bend business organizations to their will, and they can exert sufficient pressure on producers of books and films to such an extent that effective censorship is established.

There are many other examples of effective restrictions upon our freedom by the action of minority pressure groups in the field of radio, the press, the movies, and the concert world. But for the purpose of simplification, we're trying to confine our discussion tonight largely to the field of books and plays and films.

Dr. John Haynes Holmes, chairman of the American Civil Liberties Union, and John Mason Brown, one of our speakers this

evening, were largely responsible for stirring up this present controversy in the pages of *The Saturday Review of Literature*. Mr. Doré Schary, Hollywood producer and others have taken up the cudgels for the other side.

Now no one questions the legal right of these groups to exist and to exert pressure. The only question we face tonight is whether such pressure is wise or unwise, good or bad, in the exercise of democratic principles.

Tonight, Mr. Brown and Mr. Morris Ernst, a distinguished New York attorney also of the Civil Liberties Union, will uphold the position that it is bad and unwise.

Mr. Henry Epstein, former solicitor general of the State of New York, and Mr. Robert J. O'Donnell, of Iona College in Westchester County, say that it is good and just and wise.

We'll hear first from one of the men who started the argument. Mr. John Mason Brown, author and lecturer, who is still remembered all over the United States for his part in our Town Meeting in March a year ago on the question of the comics. Mr. Brown is a graduate of Harvard, for many years a dramatic critic, first on the *New York Post*, and then on the *New York Telegram*. He still keeps an alert eye on the theater for his lectures here at Town Hall and elsewhere, and in his capacity as Associate Editor of *The Saturday Review of Literature*. Mr. John Mason Brown. (Applause)

Mr. Brown:

Ladies and gentlemen, our subject tonight is not comic. I wish it were.

Fears, fears have brought us here—fears which can imperil not only artistic expression but freedom of speech itself. These fears which have brought us together are those to which the minorities and special groups are understandably susceptible. They are fears rooted in tragic and appalling facts.

No one can have lived in the contemporary world without being aware of and ashamed of the injustices, the evils, and the horrors of racial and religious persecution, but to secure the tolerance we all desire, these minority groups—or, perhaps, more accurately, certain articulate and organized minorities within them—occasionally stoop to the most intolerant and dubious of means.

In the interest of fairness, they become unfair themselves. By pressure rather than by edict and by threats offstage instead of legal tests in court, these minorities have established a new form of censorship. It is a censorship which Mr. Morris Ernst and I feel, Mr. Epstein and Mr. O'Donnell, is dangerous, totally un-American, and shockingly unreasonable. It is what I can only describe as wishful banning.

Take the now celebrated case of the excellent British film, "Oliver Twist." Due to the action of the New York Board of Rabbis,

this picture—sight unseen, even by those who have opposed it—has not been released in this country.

Why? Because, of course, of Fagin, one of Dickens' many unforgettable characters in *Oliver Twist*. Why Fagin? Because some hypersensitive Jewish people have objected to the nonexistent indignity done their people by showing on the screen a Jew who is such a deep-dyed villain.

Their strangely tardy fear is that Fagin will arouse anti-Semitism, that movie audiences will forget that Fagin is a caricature of an individual, and be persuaded that all Jews are Fagins. This in spite of the fact that in the picture, unlike the novel, Fagin is never even referred to as a Jew.

My wager is that movie audiences in this country would no more mistake Fagin for a typical Jew than they would mistake Bill Sikes, the Artful Dodger, Bumble, Monks, or Nancy Hanks for representative English people.

Let me cite another instance of wishful banning. It occurred three years ago in Bridgeport when a new musical comedy version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—yes, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, of all things—was temporarily banned by some Negro groups.

Why? Apparently, because the protesting Negroes wished to forget and wanted others to forget that their people had ever been slaves.

What they forgot, however, was

that it was the slave-owner, not the slave, who came out badly in Mrs. Stowe's pages. They also seemed entirely willing to overlook how much *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has done for their people.

The pressure of Catholic groups is equally evident. Take, for example, the operations of the Legion of Decency. The Legion does not have to ban to make itself felt.

I personally believe, and I know Mr. Ernst does, that we get nowhere by banning books and films just because they contain characters that do not flatter us.

We get nowhere by maintaining that there are not villains of all creeds and colors.

We get nowhere, Mr. O'Donnell, by pretending that the known facts of history are fiction or by insisting that no fiction can be tolerated which does not make heroes of us all.

We get nowhere by turning to the book-burning tactics of our enemy in the last war or to the gross suppressions of our opponent in the present peace.

My conviction and my fear are that by such deplorable intolerances and self-deceptions we only do harm to the cause of tolerance and freedom which should be our passionate concern. (Applause.)

Moderator Denny:

Thank you, John Mason Brown. Now, here's where we have two Harvard men at swords' points. Indeed, Mr. Brown and Mr. Henry Epstein both were born south of

the Mason-Dixon Line and spent a good deal of their lives there before they came to New York.

Mr. Epstein, former solicitor general of New York State and a distinguished New York attorney, also a member of the Civil Liberties Union, graduated from Harvard with honors in 1915, and the Harvard Law School in 1921. Mr. Epstein has argued many important cases in the field of welfare legislation and was counsel to the President's FEPC Commission in 1943. He is well qualified to discuss tonight's subject. Mr. Henry Epstein, welcome to Town Meeting. (Applause.)

Mr. Epstein:

Mr. Denny, my fellow Americans. Mr. Brown talks of censorship and calls it un-American and shockingly unreasonable. Censorship is a bad word. It has become a bad word because its basic meaning has been distorted by enthusiasts for freedom of speech who sometimes confuse freedom with license.

To put the label of censorship under protest which minority groups make in self-protection against calumny is as misleading as putting a poison label on the bottle of cod-liver oil in the medicine chest.

These groups, Mr. Brown, feel themselves threatened by films and books and presentations which hold them up to ridicule and obloquy.

What we are talking about is

the right and the propriety of minority groups in a democratic society to exercise such forms of persuasion and influence as are available to them in protection of status and security against those threats.

This is not a choice between free speech and democracy. We must avoid thinking in terms of either-or." Either-or thinking is tidy; it leaves no loose ends. But life is not that simple. We have a complicating factor in the legacy left us by a man named Adolf Hitler. The residuary legatees of centuries of persecution and mass murder cannot be comforted by the doctrinal dicta attributed to Voltaire and Milton or the neatness of the saying, "The truth will always conquer."

The ghosts of six million dead Jews warn us that Voltaire on tolerance and Milton on truth did not save them. The producers and exhibitors of such movies as the "Birth of a Nation," which portrays the American Negro in terms of the worst and most discredited stereotypes, or of "Oliver Twist," which depicts Fagin as the caricature given diabolical currency by the Nazis as the symbol of the Jew—these men have the right to produce and exhibit their products.

The author and publisher of the calumny against the Roman Catholic Church entitled the "Devil in Robes," privately printed and distributed years ago, they, too, have the right to issue their

diatribes. These things I assert. But Negroes and Jews and Catholics have at least the equal right to voice their protest.

If the producer or the publisher concludes that the public is likely to be dissuaded by such protests from viewing or purchasing his offering, and if he accordingly withdraws it from circulation, I observe nothing at work but the proper influencing of public opinion in a free society.

The right to protest is inseparable from the right to speak. It may be written or spoken on placards and carried by pickets. The conflict here is engendered by the head-on collision of opposing rights, both guaranteed under our concept of freedom of speech—the freedom to exhibit a picture and the absolute right to protest its evil effects.

Yet this is not an insoluble paradox. The right to protest means more than the right to protest only so long as the protests are ineffectual. To put a protest into action is not a matter of censorship or over-sensitivity.

Minorities who are threatened cannot rest on quotations from Voltaire and Milton, nor can they ignore the stereotype of Fagin, or Uncle Tom, or a Borgia Pope. That they seek to put that protest into action is not, Mr. Brown, a matter of over-sensitivity or censorship, but rather of instinctive self-protection within an ill-ordered world.

Mr. O'Donnell's and my posi-

tion is this: Minority groups have the right to and should strive by all means within the ordered controls of society to persuade the public to reject that which threatens their security in the democratic order.

They have the right to and may freely employ every medium of communication, every channel of influence they can command. To call the exercise of this right in a free society censorship is an attempt to by-pass the only true road to real freedom. (Applause.)

Moderator Denny:

Thank you, Henry Epstein. One of New York's best known lawyers is Morris L. Ernst. He was born in Uniontown, Alabama, graduated from Williams College and New York Law School. Mr. Ernst was a very active member of the American Civil Liberties Union, and still is. He was a member of the President's Commission on Civil Rights, and is author of many books, his most recent being *So Far, So Good*, which is largely autobiographical. Mr. Morris Ernst is frequently heard on Town Meeting, and we're glad to welcome him back to the platform. (Applause.)

Mr. Ernst:

Both previous speakers have talked tonight about the search for truth in our land. We are all opposed to the Nazi-Communist suppression of truth by controls imposed by the state.

I assume that even our oppo-

nents will shout their faith in the wisdom and common sense of the people. However, it is within this area of faith in the people that the disagreement between us exists.

Henry Epstein trusts only some of the people, some of the time. We trust all of the people, all of the time. At least we trust them more than we trust the bosses of organized suppression groups whether labor, chambers of commerce, racial, or religious.

John Mason Brown and I do not think the people are always right, but we would rather leave controls and decisions over man's mental diet to the people than to so-called pressure groups.

Town Hall is a good example of what we stand for. This debate can be disapproved or applauded as you see fit. "The people know best." That is our slogan.

Hence, we are against any organized efforts to prevent ideas reaching the people. I say "organized" because people join organizations in order to exert extra influence. So if I call up George Denny and say, "Please don't let anyone talk about lawyers in derogatory fashion," that is only persuasion. But if all the bar associations of the land put heat on George Denny and his trustees to prevent any slur on any lawyer, then we're in danger.

You must know that organized suggestions are in fact not only suggestions. They always—and can't be otherwise—carry the ide-

f pressure, duress, and threat. Moreover, such organized protests are seldom, if ever, made public. The stealth of organized suppression alone condemns it.

I understand that sacrificial nurses might not like the way that nurses are depicted in the movie, "The Snake Pit." But it's frightening that the picture was cut in certain places because of organized nurse pressure.

Negroes might well wish that the "Birth of a Nation" were never screened, but it's silly for Negro groups to suppress it.

Jewish groups are doing you and themselves a disservice when they try to prevent the publication of the diaries of the great Russian novelist, Dostoyevsky as an anti-Semitic document.

Catholics are constantly bringing organized pressure to prevent our public reading anything about changes in birth-control laws or divorce statutes.

Once we approve, for any reason, the organized effort to suppress at the source, we're cutting off the possibility of the public showing its approval or disapproval.

I am not against pleas to the public, even picket lines, to see or not to see a picture or read a book, but I oppose organized mass pressure groups working to prevent our ability to make the decisions. Let these groups educate the public and stop threatening the editors, broadcasters, and movie moguls.

Here is the problem in a nutshell: What if Negro or Catholic groups thought it bad to have this program go on the air tonight? Do you favor such groups, through their vast organized memberships, working on Town Hall to prevent your right to hear this debate, or do you trust yourself?

Of course, Town Hall would be no push-over, but our society is not made up of only stout lovers of freedom like George Denny and his trustees.

Unlike Dostoyevsky, we hold that no ideas are poisonous; only the suppression of ideas is poisonous. If ideas are unwholesome, the human race must someday become adult enough to appraise, to accept, or reject. It is such critical capacity of man that makes literacy a worth-while asset for the human race. (Applause.)

Moderator Denny:

Thank you, Morris Ernst, Well, who said there wasn't two sides to this question.

Our next speaker is the distinguished Catholic teacher with wide experience on lecture and forum platforms. Robert J. O'Donnell is the professor of philosophy at Iona College in New Rochelle, New York, and is an active participant in the work of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. We're happy to welcome Mr. O'Donnell to Town Hall. Robert J. O'Donnell. (Applause.)

Mr. O'Donnell

My colleagues may remember

that the late Justice Holmes once observed that freedom of expression is a guarantee of every American, but it is no social sanction to cry "Fire" in a crowded theater.

Any democracy preventing a minority defending itself from a false ideological atmosphere of opinion which condones a caste system in human rights is undeserving the support of free men.

Exercising the right of protest and pressure against any majority disregarding the true characteristics of a minority is not constricting the area of freedom, but eliminating the irresponsibility which, individually and collectively, history underscores as its suicidal abuse.

Too frequently participants in debate imitate Don Quixotes tilting windmills. The minority is exercising, in its public discussions and its pressures, the rights of any citizen to organized action against a complacent acceptance of a social abuse.

No minority is required to submit to vicious stereotypes that all too frequently are the least common denominator of the failings and the vices, rather than the contributions and the virtues of any racial or religious group.

We commonly hear more of the Negro in terms of Stepin Fetchits than George Carvers and Marian Andersons; more of the Jew in terms of Fagins and Shylocks than of Bernard Baruchs.

I strongly suspect, Mr. Brown and Mr. Ernst, that abstract dis-

cussion of the rights of freedom of expression unfettered by social obligations is really playing the role of the Mad Hatter in civil realities.

Minorities have the right to preservation, to respect for their group integrity, to exercise their weight for equality under law.

Like freedom of expression, censorship in this sense, is certainly a two-edged sword. It is not any more an assurance of license to a minority than freedom should be indulged in as license perpetrated by a majority.

Some members of any group fulfill the vileness of stereotype, but the social dynamite is generalization of that stereotype as the judgment of each and every individual of the group.

No greater fiction exists than the political, social, economic homogeneity of any racial or religious group, the caricature of which the intellectually lazy man accepts as the face and the features of reality.

The right of a collective pressure, therefore, is an appeal for common fair play, for a minimum of legal restraints requisite for social peace, too often broken by viewing races and religion through the cracked mirror of prejudice. It is the means and the opinion-making field of communication by which a minority hurl truth in the teeth of the lie, no matter how hoary with the trappings of an uncritical tradition.

"Uncle Tom" is a fiction, not

scription of a people. It is censorship that is the social antidote that most heinous of generalizations — the abominable treatment of virtues and vices as some exclusive property of that most explicable myth—the race.

To challenge distortions that can spread over the screen within a year to audiences of 30 to 40 million is to sharpen dramatically the attention of the moguls of publicity and propaganda the need for recognition of neglected responsibilities.

The public has no obligation in conscience to support what it perceives as an abuse of its convictions. The exploitations of screen and publishing techniques, both by the Nazis and the Communists, who are aware that ideas are weapons, too, and the studies of the impact of films on the imaginations of children by eminent psychologists forcefully emphasize how formidable a weapon such media can place in the hands of ethically illiterate and the socially irresponsible to create a climate of chaos, rather than concord, in any community. (Applause.)

Moderator Denny:

Thank you, Mr. O'Donnell. Well, gentlemen, suppose you join me up here around the microphone for a little discussion while our audience gets ready for the question period. I understand they're not asking questions out there. I don't see many hands going up. I don't see many ques-

tion cards being asked for. If you don't hurry up and ask your question now, you might not get it in during the question period.

Now, gentlemen, will you come up here around the microphone. We haven't heard from you for a while, Mr. Brown. I saw you making notes over there. Have you a comment?

Mr. Brown: Yes. I have a great many. And I furthermore protest violently against being counted among the ethically illiterate. (*Laughter and applause.*) I heard a speech which seemed to me just now, though high-falutin and highly fluted, somewhat ethically illiterate itself. (*Laughter.*) It came out of the suppression of truth. I go back to Morris Ernst's and my belief in the people, and I would like to ask Mr. Epstein and Mr. O'Donnell a question. Mr. Ernst and I have seen "Oliver Twist" — the unreleased picture. Fagin, may I repeat, is never referred to as a Jew. The real villains, I assure you, are Bill Sikes or all the other characters in a commendable film. The wonder is that the British people had the guts to release a film which paints so hideous a picture of their society in the early nineteenth century. The villain of "Oliver Twist" is not Fagin. He's amiable compared to Bill Sikes. The villain is poverty. (Applause.)

Mr. Denny: Thank you. Mr. Epstein, would you like to take that first?

Mr. Epstein: Well, Mr. Brown

THE SPEAKERS' COLUMN

MORRIS LEOPOLD ERNST—Mr. Ernst was born in 1888 in Uniontown, Alabama. He has an A.B. degree from Williams College, and an LL.B. from New York Law School. Before he started his law practice in 1915, Mr. Ernst engaged in the manufacture of shirts and in the retail furniture business.

Mr. Ernst served as attorney for the American Newspaper Guild, as arbiter for Mayor La Guardia in the 1934 taxi cab strike; and he drafted legislation for Governor Lehman on insurance and banking matters. He has been a member of the Pennsylvania Anthracite Coal Commission. He has been a member of the New York State Banking Board since its beginnings and is a member of President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights.

Well-known as a lecturer before clubs and colleges, Mr. Ernst is the author of many books and magazine articles.

JOHN MASON BROWN—A dramatic critic and author, John Mason Brown was born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1900. He has an A.B. from Harvard; an L.H.D. from Williams; and a D.Litt. from the University of Montana. Mr. Brown has worked for the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, taught history of the theater at the University of Montana during summer sessions, been associate

editor and dramatic critic for *Theater Arts Monthly* and staff lecturer for the American Laboratory Theater.

From 1929 to 1941, Mr. Brown was dramatic critic for the *New York Evening Post*. This was followed by a year on the *New York World Telegram*. He has given courses on playwriting and the theater at Yale, at the Middlebury College Breadloaf Writers' Conference, and at Harvard. Since 1944, he has been an associate editor and columnist for *Saturday Review of Literature*. He is also the conductor of a radio program, "Of Men and Books."

During World War II, as a lieutenant in the U.S.N.R., Mr. Brown was on the staff of Vice Admiral Alan Kirk for the invasion of Sicily and Normandy. He has been on inactive duty since December, 1944. Mr. Brown has written many books and articles on the theater.

HENRY EPSTEIN—Mr. Epstein is a former Solicitor General of the State of New York. He is chairman of the National Community Relations Advisory Council and a member of the Anti-Defamation League.

ROBERT J. O'DONNELL—Dr. O'Donnell, who was formerly a professor at Hunter College, is now professor of philosophy at Iona College at New Rochelle, New York.

knows perfectly well what is in the minds of the people—anyone who is portrayed as you see Fagin when he comes in the first time on the screen. You see the back with a skull cap. You see the long wisps of hair along the side. You see the hands extended in a gesture which can personify only one people. There is no doubting whatsoever what is intended there, and to say that the audience is going to construe that in the same light as Bill Sikes or Nancy Hanks is just poppycock and rot, because you are appealing there. (Applause.)

The appeal is there made in the

same caricature as that which the Nazis exploited in *der Stuermer* to the death of six million people. We don't want that type of stuff spread in the sections of America where it will do harm. (Applause.)

Mr. Denny: Thank you. Have you got a comment, Mr. Ernst?

Mr. Ernst: I've got a very calm question to ask. (Laughter.) That is, wouldn't the people of this audience honestly like to see this picture "Oliver Twist"? (Shout and applause.) One more question. If you saw it, do you think it would hurt you, or do you think

it would hurt somebody else? It's always the somebody else.

Mr. Denny: Thank you. Mr. O'Donnell.

Mr. O'Donnell: I'm very pleased to find out that Mr. Mason Brown has occupied a position among the moguls of publicity and propaganda to whom I ascribe ethical illiteracy. Far be it from me to try to indulge in such an appellation to a gentleman who is a critic.

Mr. Brown: May I interrupt? You obviously know as little about criticism as you do about the problem we're discussing. (Laughter and applause.) You and I and the Catholic Church are as one on this. What we believe in, we become propagandists for. We disagree in what we believe in. That's the difference. (Applause.)

Mr. O'Donnell: In this particular point, Mr. Brown, I was making my references, of course, to those to whom the decisions as to the use of publicity and propaganda are ascribed. I would consider that belief in terms of propaganda can either be good or can be bad.

In terms of what Mr. Epstein has suggested of the world-wide spread of the convictions and the attitudes and the propaganda of national socialism in terms of anti-Semitism, I would suggest that today, more than any time in the history of the world, there is a growing and increasing sensitivity on the part of the people, not to be cast into second-class citizenship, not to be cast in the framework of caricatures, no matter

how they may be sanctioned by the classics.

The conviction, above anything else today, is the position in terms either of colonial people or people within our own lands to demand the dignity of each man to be represented for what he is. Judgment in terms of generalization is a falsity which I feel is still a property of most of our means of communication. (Applause.)

Mr. Ernst: May I shift a moment and ask either Mr. Epstein or Mr. O'Donnell how they feel about pressure groups not on the religious level? What about the bankers who don't want any movie made with a snide banker? Or no lawyer shown who is a shyster? Because they say "That will become a stereotype."

Or do they only say there should be protection on racial and religious grounds, and how do they draw the line?

Mr. Epstein: A very simple answer to that. They all have in a democracy the right to exert their influences in every way that it can be done lawfully and if the people who are in the right have the courage to present their picture, they may do it. If they are afraid to, then that is what happens in the experience of a democracy, whether they are bankers or anybody else. (Applause.)

Mr. Denny: Thank you. Mr. Brown?

Mr. Brown: Mr. Epstein, I happen to stand before this group as

a somewhat underprivileged person. I don't belong to a minority group, supposedly. But I belong to three minority groups. First of all, I was born in the South, and that is the place you know how sneeringly the word "Southerner" is used by the ethically illiterate Northerner. (*Laughter and applause.*)

Secondly, I happened to go to Harvard. I have never seen a musical nor read or seen a play or movie in which the mere mention of Harvard wasn't almost the restitution of Minsky's. (*Laughter.*) Thirdly, I happen to be a dramatic critic, a profession not always loved, though venerable. (*Laughter.*)

Mr. Denny: Never mind, John, you saved George Denny from the theater.

Mr. Brown: I saved the theater from you. I saved you for the Town Hall, Mr. Denny. (*Laughter.*)

The point is I know these smears against the South which sicken me. They are absolutely stupid, as stupid as the mass smear against the Jew, the Catholic, the Protestant, the Episcopalian, the Baptist, the Mormon—whatever it may be. But I have never protested about plays in which dramatic critics were attacked or books in which Southerners were attacked. The test of our freedom is that people are able to draw individuals, not types, but individuals as we all know they are.

Fagin is not in this thing an indictment of the Jewish race. Due to the fine elasticity of Mr. Epstein's mind, he has jumped to that hypersensitive conclusion. Personally, I am not a Jew; I just happen to be an Episcopalian. I have never thought of the Jewish people in terms of Fagin in my life. All right, they did think of it in Germany. I'm talking about freedom in America and not freedom in Hitler's Germany. (*Applause.*)

Mr. Denny: Thank you. Mr. Epstein, I believe you had a question.

Mr. Epstein: Just for Mr. Brown's information, I was born in South Carolina. I saw a Negro lynched when I was less than six years of age. And I also was educated at Harvard, so that we're equal at least on that score. But I can tell you that Mr. Brown not only doesn't understand, but doesn't know what it is to be one of those who are subjected to second-class citizenship anywhere in this world. (*Applause.*)

Mr. Ernst: I didn't go to Harvard. (*Laughter.*) I was born in Alabama. (*Laughter.*) Let's get this thing away from personalities. Jews have no right to be liked. They only have a right like all other people—not to have a rule laid down against them. I don't want any rule laid down for Jews which gives us through appeasement a preferential position of protection. Because what is happening to the Jewish leader-

ship of America is that it's running and it is refusing to put its heels in the ground and say "We are a people. We'll take it and we'll answer back, and truth will win out." To the extent we suppress, we are running away and we are inviting the very bigotry which Henry Epstein deplores.

(Applause.)

Mr. Denny: Mr. O'Donnell.

Mr. O'Donnell: I now know I'm the minority. I happen to have been born in Brooklyn.

(Laughter.)

I should like particularly to point out at this moment, that, certainly, when we are speaking here in terms of individuality, that is exactly the position that is being emphasized by the affirmative. We believe that within a society made up of many groups that have come from all the ends of the earth and of many faiths, of a symphony of the people that is America, there is an imperative need for each and every note and each and every part of that score to have its proper place, and to suggest, primarily, at this particular time, that a majority, as such, can impose upon us the acceptance of any particular caricature—any particular misconception and judgment—is to indicate that no group has the right to equality under law.

It is to affirm equality under law, at a time when an uncritical acceptance of preconception has been imposed upon us, that we of the affirmative are attempting to

suggest that it is only by each minority and every individual in each minority having the right to affirm their human rights in the form of public opinion and exert their collective pressure that it is possible for us to say that a democracy can be realized here in the United States.

Mr. Denny: Thank you, Mr. O'Donnell. Mr. Ernst?

Mr. Ernst: I've got a question for Mr. O'Donnell. I love the symphony of the people. I am fearful of the people who go back of the symphony orchestra leader and take out some of the notes.

I want to ask Mr. O'Donnell would he be in favor, not as a matter of law but as a matter of decency, of having all the pressure groups—Catholic, Jewish, and otherwise—expose at the end of each year where they exerted pressure, how they exerted pressure, and what the result was—particularly *how* they exerted the pressure. Is he willing to have disclosure of the techniques of pressure of the Catholic groups?

Mr. O'Donnell: That sounds very much, Mr. Ernst, like an attempt to apply the Taft-Hartley Bill on a very large and cosmic scale. I would suggest, first of all, that certainly in the area of public pressure, it is public. The techniques that are employed are obviously open to consideration. The utilization of influence in terms of persuasion against agencies of publicity or the screen is a

thing that I think can be seen by any eminent individual. The assent that it may be a technique or a tactic that may be hidden, I believe, is an illusion that I could not accept.

Mr. Denny: Thank you. We may get a little more of this discussion in the question period, but we must get ready for our question period now while we hear the following message.

Announcer: You are listening to the 559th broadcast of America's Town Meeting of the Air, coming to you from Town Hall in New York City. Our subject is "Should Minority Groups Exercise Censorship Over Books and Films?"

Would you like a copy of tonight's Town Meeting, complete with questions and answers to follow? If you would, then send 10 cents to Town Hall, Box 56, New York 46, and ask for the Town Meeting Bulletin. Please do not enclose stamps, and allow about two weeks for delivery.

Have you sent in your contribi-

bution to help send your Town Meeting 'Round-the-World? Remember, we are preparing a scroll to contain the names of all contributors, listed under their own cities and towns, to present to the mayor of each city in which Town Meeting originates this summer.

Now here is a message transcribed from one prominent American to you all. Listen!

Miss Hayes: This is Helen Hayes. One of the earliest forces for political education and action in America was the Town Meeting at which each citizen had a voice in his government. America's Town Meeting of the Air, a modern adaptation of the original idea, goes around the world this summer to present the democratic way of free discussion to other peoples of the world. Support this project for world peace by sending your dollar for democracy to Town Hall, New York.

Announcer: Now for our question period, we return you to Mr. Denny.

QUESTIONS, PLEASE!

Mr. Denny: Now we are ready for the questions. We'll start with the young lady down here on the third row.

Lady: My question is addressed to Mr. Brown. You disagreed with the reaction of a minority group on the showing of "Oliver Twist." Would you be of the same opinion, Mr. Brown, regarding the show-

ing of "Oliver Twist" and its implications, if a majority group was involved?

Mr. Brown: Oh, most certainly I would stick to my point.

Lady: The question tonight is "a minority group." Now I want to know if you'd be of the same feeling if a minority group were attacked?

Mr. Brown: Certainly, I would be. I think a minority group is also attacked in *Oliver Twist*. The thing that bothers me is this question of how can you have a literature without villians anymore than how can you have life without people who are good and bad. If you reduce all literature to what special groups want to be seen as, literature would suddenly become so much printed Pollyanna and would give diabetes to the readers of the world. (Applause.)

Mr. Denny: Thank you, Mr. Brown. The lady on the other side of the house. Yes?

Lady: My question is for Mr. Ernst. Did the people know best in Germany?

Mr. Ernst: They certainly didn't. But they're going to have to learn in Germany to know best some day. We can't keep an army there forever. Some day the people of Germany will have to join the human race again. We have got that choice and no other choice in the world, unless you think we're going to run Germany forever and day.

Young Man: I'd like to address my question to Mr. Epstein. Mr. Epstein, why are the schools permitted to let the children read *Oliver Twist* and yet not have the picture shown, which is less discriminating than the novel?

Mr. Epstein: That's a very good question. There is a serious doubt in the minds of some whether the actual reading of *Oliver Twist* may not be the subject of a dis-

cussion within a classroom which can be reached and commented upon by the intelligence of teachers in order that the class can understand the gradations and distinctions of prejudice and place it in its proper setting. But when 30 million people see a picture in which there is depicted a caricature representing a people in sections of the country where they have never seen a Jew, that is where the menace comes in.

Mind you, I don't say that they don't have a right to show the picture. I say that in a democratic society, those who are seriously affected or who fear the effects, whether rightly or wrongly, have the right to exercise every pressure which they can exert to prevent the menace to what they consider their security. (Applause.)

Mr. Denny: Thank you. The gentleman under the balcony there.

Man: I'd like to address my question to Mr. O'Donnell. Do you not believe that there is a fundamental difference between minority pressure as a means of self-preservation — protection against the characterization of the stereotype — and minority action in masses of public interest that affect all of us, such as birth control, mercy killing, and other things of that sort?

Mr. O'Donnell: I believe there is certainly a difference, yes. Any question, presumably in terms of stereotypes, is in the order, prob-

ably, of propaganda and the activity that should be taken along that line.

I want to suggest in terms of mercy killing and of birth control, you have here another problem that is certainly much more complex in terms of the ethics of any given community.

Now in that action I would say that here again the activity of disseminating a point of view is the point of view of, at least, informing the people. I would say that persuasion in these terms is again within the area of public opinion and public discussion.

I would say that, in terms of minority activities and respect to stereotypes, we must make our discrimination in the terms of using public pressure to eliminate wherever the social responsibility of that stereotype probably is wrong.

In terms of the question of ethical issues, it's a much more complicated discussion, and in terms of its complexity I again think that public expression is necessary, and even public persuasion may follow. It's of a different order, and yet I think, however, the techniques may, nevertheless, be the same.

Mr. Denny: Thank you, Mr. O'Donnell. Mr. John Mason Brown is almost on the edge of his chair. He's right up here at the platform now. Mr. Brown, you evidently have something on your mind.

Mr. Brown: I'd like to go back

to both of those questions, if I may. They both seem to be highly admirable questions. I think the reason that *Oliver Twist* at the moment can be read but not seen goes back to that lack of trust in the people that Mr. Morris Ernst mentioned earlier.

Apparently people believe that people are not affected by reading, that we do not inhale through the eyes as we do in the presence of motion pictures. What bothers me is the inconsistency. *Oliver Twist* has been acted in this country for years with people like Nat Goodwin in the part. It's been seen as movies. It has not turned us into Germans under Hitler.

May I say the same thing is true of such a film as the last filming of "The Three Musketeers," when I gather—I'm only assuming this—that due to churchly pressure groups, Cardinal Richelieu was suddenly unfrocked in the film. We have all been brought up seeing Richelieu, we've seen the cardinal dress, we all know that he was a worldly cleric. History says he was. Those are bygones. His worldliness has nothing to do with our attitude towards the Catholic church today.

Uncle Tom—the fact that he was a slave—let me repeat, reflects upon slavery as an institution.

May I ask this audience to remember that a great Negro leader, Mr. Booker T. Washington, when he wrote his autobiography had no such hypersensitivity, he en-

itled that book *Up From Slavery*, and the whole point of the title was the "UP." That's what we can be proud of—the progress made over what was horrible in the past.

Mr. Denny: Mr. O'Donnell?

Mr. O'Donnell: The progress of people is made by their overcoming of obstacles. To assist in overcoming obstacles, it is necessary to utilize whatever means are at their disposal to see that there is no abuse.

Hearing of the people in terms often of, let us say, an unrealized or an undefined consideration, rings to mind the comment that once was made of a Chinese warlord, who, in order to get a loan from the United States, decided that he had to make some appeal to public opinion. To do so, he decided that he would make a declaration in each and every village of his state, that democracy could be given to his people. On that day on which he declared it could be given, thousands upon thousands of people poured into the capital city with their bags, waiting to get their share of democracy.

Mr. Denny: Thank you. Now let's have a question from the gentleman here on the front row.

Man: My question is addressed to Mr. Epstein. I just want to ask Mr. Epstein if he would be in favor of suppressing the Old Testament. After all, many of the characters depicted in the Old Testament were Jews, and many of them

were very bad characters. I wonder if people reading the Old Testament wouldn't become anti-Semites. (*Applause.*)

Mr. Epstein: There's a very simple answer to that. There are people today who are contemplating the placing of the story of the Old Testament in pictures, and one of the menacing factors which both the Catholic and the Jewish groups are concerned with is the manner in which that may be portrayed. If the portrayal of that is in such a way as to bring discord and threats to security to a minority group such as the Jews are, they have a right to exert every pressure that they can, not to wait until after the million dollars or two have been invested in it, and then to picket, which Mr. Ernst says they have the right to do, but to exert that pressure in advance.

And this is where I have the answer: Mr. Ernst—and Mr. Brown agrees with him—and I quote Mr. Ernst, "They are not against pleas to the public, even picket lines, to see or not to see a picture or read a book. They do, however, oppose letting the producer or publisher know in advance that the group affected will make that plea to the public."

In other words, Mr. Brown and Mr. Ernst approve a policy of seducing producers and publishers by studied silence and then wrecking their investments by the public protest. I am against that kind of intellectual dishonesty.

Mr. Denny: Thank you, Mr. Epstein. A question over in this other part of the house, the lady in the red hat.

Lady: To Mr. Ernst or Mr. Brown. Isn't it rather coincidental at a time when so many Jewish boys fought for a homeland—for their national homeland—that England, who opposed it, naturally, would take this time for the showing of "Oliver Twist"?

Mr. Ernst: The people who say this isn't the time in the realm of thought usually end up by saying it's never the time. Have faith in the American people, lady. We'll give answer with ideas, by other ideas.

Lady: Why doesn't England show a picture depicting good Jews, something that they've really done that is good?

Mr. Ernst: The answer to a bad Jew in a picture is a good Jew in a picture. Don't worry; go forward with ideas. Don't run away. The more you run, the more the mob's going to chase you. I'm a Jew, and I won't run. Stand up for it. (Applause.)

Mr. Denny: Now while our speakers prepare their summaries, we'll call in an announcer who has a special message for you.

Announcer: We begin our 15th year on the air with our broadcast of May 31 when our subject will be: "How Can We Best Resolve Our Differences With Soviet Russia?"

The Foreign Ministers of the United States, Britain, France,

and Soviet Russia will meet on May 23 in Paris to try once again to work out peace terms to mark the real end of World War II. This conference will be at its height at the time we discuss this question. So make your plans now to be with us for our Fifteenth Anniversary Broadcast May 31st.

Two weeks later, on June 14th, your Town Meeting will take place in Madison Square Garden when we'll be the guests of Rotary International which will be attended by twenty to thirty thousand Rotarians from fifty-one nations around the world.

Our subject will be: "How Can Free Peoples Share Peace and Well Being With the Rest of the World?" Our speakers will be Charles Brannan, Secretary of Agriculture; Philip Murray, President of the Congress of Industrial Organizations; Eric Johnston, President of the Society of Motion Picture Producers; and a fourth speaker to be announced. You won't want to miss either of these great broadcasts.

Now for the summaries of tonight's discussion, here is Mr. Denny.

Mr. Denny: Our first summary comes from Mr. O'Donnell.

Mr. O'Donnell: When the United States accepts the best rather than the worst as representative of its component group, perhaps a balanced judgment of its people will be attained.

Censorship in terms of protection and persuasion by group as we

individual aids in striking the present balance. It is not an absolute dogma we offer or a panacea, as Mr. Brown intimates. Censorship is offered as a means a democracy open to a minority to fulfill the vacant role of giving a voice to the conscience of the community. Professor Carl Becker observed that pragmatically "freedom is the right to do what will not harm the other." This is but another interpretation of the golden rule, applicable to groups as well as individuals. (Applause.)

Mr. Denny: Thank you. Our next summary from Mr. John Brown. Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown: Mr. Denny, I think we've talked all too much here right about minorities. Every minority in a democracy is entitled to protection, but the majority is entitled to protection and freedom, too.

As I see it, all of us who live in this country are Americans. It's

simple as that. I think it's high time that we stopped talking and thinking only in terms of special minority or pressure groups which put their interest above the country's. As Nazi Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and Soviet Russia could have taught us, we can produce propaganda, but we can't produce literature unless the minds of our writers are free.

Our best hope for true freedom for all of us to take Thomas Jefferson's oath to heart and swear, on the altar of God, eternal hos-

tility to every form of tyranny over the mind of man. (Applause.)

Mr. Denny: Thank you. Now Mr. Epstein.

Mr. Epstein: I am going to quote from a letter by Margaret Halsey, the anthropologist, to Mr. Brown's own magazine. "That Jews and Negroes object strenuously to the portrayals of Uncle Tom and Shylock is a fact. The other fact, the fact to which this one is related, is that Jews and Negroes in this country are subjected to consistent humiliations and unwarranted repudiations. Nothing more complex is involved than stimulus and response. If you apply the stimulus of rejection and repudiation, you get the response from Jews and Negroes that they simply and desperately cannot afford to have Uncle Remus and Fagin displayed to the exploiters, the restrictors, and the segregators." (Applause.)

Mr. Denny: Thank you, Mr. Epstein. Mr. Morris Ernst.

Mr. Ernst: I am in favor of one pressure group only. I'm persuaded. The lawyers should have the right. The lawyers should have the right to say that no ridiculous lawyer is ever on the screen, because law is important. Law determines jurisprudence and jurisprudence determines fairness of living. So come along, join me in the lawyer's pressure group. (Laughter and applause.)

Mr. Denny: Thank you, Mr. Ernst, Mr. Epstein, Mr. Brown, and Mr. O'Donnell, for your contribu-

tions to our understanding of this highly controversial question.

Copies of tonight's discussion will be available in our Town Meeting Bulletin which you all may obtain by sending 10 cents to Town Hall, Box 56, New York 46, New York.

Now, last week we announced five of those national organizations whose representatives will accompany us on our 'Round the World Trip. Tonight, I'm pleased to announce six more organizations which will comprise the other part of our World Town Hall seminar. Representatives of the American Federation of Labor and the C.I.O. will go along—we'll announce their names next week. For the Fraternal Order of Eagles, Mr. Robert W. Hanson, editor of the Eagles' publication; for the American Farm Bureau Federation, Mr. George Wilson, of the State of California; for the American Legion, Mr. John J. Barnhart, vice president of Cannon Mills of Kannapolis, North Carolina; and for the American Library Association, Dr. Milton Lord, its president-elect and librarian of the Boston Public Library. There will be 20 national organizations in all, and we'll tell you more about some of the others next week.

Now, I'm sure you'll be glad to

know that thanks to the generous contribution of our listeners we've received just about half as much as we need to pay our expenses around the world, including printing in 10 languages, booklets to tell the Town Meeting story to pay other expenses in connection with the trip.

Many of you are writing to tell us that you've been listening to Town Meeting from the first but have never written before. Won't you take this opportunity tonight to help share this American idea with the people of other lands who would like to know how we use freedom of speech to help us find the right answers. Mail your contribution tonight to Town Hall, New York 56, Box 46, New York.

Next week, we'll turn to an increasingly important question—"What Should We Do About the Communist Threat in Asia?" Our speakers will be Harold Isaacs, author and foreign correspondent for *Newsweek*; John M. Vorys, Representative from Ohio; H. Knickerbocker, author and foreign correspondent for I.N.S., and Sirdar J. J. Singh, president of the India League of America. We invite you to be with us next Tuesday and every week at the time at the sound of the crier's bell.